

The Landmark Practice

Ben Stevens spoke to managing director Nick Roberts, director of environmental planning Bernice Roberts and associate director & principal landscape architect Chris McDermott

Nick Roberts launched The Landmark Practice in 1985, initially as a trading arm of Avon Wildlife Trust, to offer landscape design based on ecological principles. The business flourished in response to market demand to meet increasingly stringent planning law on environmental conservation.

Today, a team of landscape architects, environmental planners, ecologists and graphic designers work to deliver realistic, cost-effective and innovative measures to mitigate adverse impacts of development. It covers all aspects of environmental planning, design and management, from baseline landscape and ecological evaluation to project design and long-term monitoring of developed sites. The company guarantees quality by ensuring that a principal consultant, supported by this highly qualified team, manages all projects.

The Landmark Practice actively supports environmental causes and promotes education by working with universities and CPD trainers to provide specialist skills in environmental planning and ecology. In 2007, it was awarded the first RTPi Environmental Planning and Protection Award for its work in the sector.



1 GIS plan from Jordan landscape assessment
2 Nick Roberts
3 Bernice Roberts
4 Chris McDermott
5 Sketch for Howell's Mere, Wiltshire



| AT A GLANCE | |
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| The Landmark Practice | |
| | Offices: Bristol Established: 1985 Number of Staff: 17 Turnover: >£1m Key projects: Ajloun Development & Preservation Plan, Jordan; Exeter University campus redevelopment; Bristol City Council wind turbine project manager & EIA; Bourne Hill, Salisbury District Council, EIA & EAP; Adanac Park OS HQ, EIA & landscape masterplan, Barker Mill Estate; Wessex Water wind turbines EIA; Avonmouth Docks wind turbines (Phase 1 and 2) EIAs; landscape masterplan & design for Filton High School, South Gloucestershire; Royal National College for the Blind; Hereford & Melksham Oak Community School; Aardman Animations HQ landscape design; Howell's Mere, Lower Mill Estate landscape design; Tintinhull House, National Trust; South Devon College, Plymouth ecology masterplan; Bristol Deep Sea Container Terminal, Avonmouth, birds assessment Website: www.TheLandmarkPractice.com |



any questions

How would you describe the philosophy of the practice?

Nick Roberts (NR): Our tag line is 'Sustainability in Practice'. We originally thought, naively, that arts and sciences could always unite to create exciting and ecologically sound landscape designs, using locally sourced, ethically raised native plants. We found this model was unattainable on some projects, where clients and planning authorities sought a more traditional approach. However, we continue to promote an ecological and sustainable approach to our work.

In the early years, we had to work hard at promoting sustainable design, but now it's mainstream.

What would you say to people who oppose onshore wind turbines?

Bernice Roberts (BR): I respect anyone who has an opinion on the wind turbine debate. Interestingly, we have received only support from the local community for the schemes that we have been involved with. The fact that these are either in, or close to, historically industrial areas illustrates the social acceptability of installing wind turbines.

Opposition usually stems from fear of the unknown, or of change. To allay fears, it is essential that EIAs that inform wind turbine schemes are genuine, accurate and robust. The industry is young and, as such, there is little monitoring data to counter preconceptions of turbine impacts. However, in consultation events, we are finding increasing awareness that turbines can only be erected where there is reasonable wind supply and that, as with other sectors,

development will cause some change.

There is also support for decentralising UK energy supplies, not only to address the effects of climate change but also because domestic energy supply is increasingly vulnerable to global political disruption and price swings.

You've just won the contract for a project in Jordan. How did you become involved?

Chris McDermott (CMD): We had previously worked on smaller-scale landscape assessment projects in Jordan, including one assessing the impact of a new Royal Palace in a mountainous location. Our work was well received by the Government and the Royal Society of Nature Conservation – one of the most respected NGOs in the region – and we were invited by the RSCN and The Ministry of Tourism, with funding

from the World Bank, to tender for the study of a large area around Ajloun.

Ajloun lies in a hilly district and the area receives higher precipitation than most of the Middle East, creating a Mediterranean landscape, with large forests of Aleppo Pine interspersed with olive groves and divided by deep wadis. Unfortunately, increasing population pressure is damaging the landscape and its cultural heritage.

We are looking at how the resulting development strategy might fit into emerging local and regional planning law. It's an immensely fascinating project, which we hope will lead to more, similar studies in the Middle East.

What are you doing as a firm to reduce your environmental impact?

NR: We have a number of core initiatives and we are always looking for new ways to reduce our impact. We

have policies to reduce office waste and our carbon footprint, to use recyclables and to ensure that journeys are kept to a minimum and completed by public transport where possible.

We encourage staff to develop initiatives themselves, so we've installed showers to allow staff to walk or run to work and created covered, secure bike units. We've also joined the local car-share scheme. We don't think twice about the potential environmental cost of our actions – it's ingrained in the way we work.

Achieving low-carbon travel for business remains a difficult aim, but before embarking on new commissions, we consider distance to service the project, and whether we can sub-contract work locally. Considering our carbon footprint takes time, but it's core to how we operate.

Do you think landscape management and planning are often sidelined by the design aspect of the profession?

CMD: Yes. Management and planning are fundamental aspects of every project. From the client's point of view, the planning phase of projects can seem protracted and expensive. Issues are often quite complex and political.

In many respects, the design element is probably the most tangible and enjoyable part. The client can look at the drawings and understand what they are getting for their money. To many developers, management is an inconvenient add-on that costs money. It may not even be their concern once a site is adopted or sold on. It is for us as landscape architects to express the intrinsic value of sound planning and management, and to explain the

associated cost savings. It requires a lot of thought to conceive an appropriate sustainable development scheme (planning). It then needs to function well and look good (design) and should be looked after properly for the foreseeable future (management).

What were the challenges of designing a nature reserve at Portishead Quays?

BR: Many! The site is adjacent to the Severn Estuary Special Protection Area and the nature reserve was born from planning conditions and a complicated S106 agreement to safeguard the European site from impacts of residential development.

We had a good EIA database to inform the masterplan, but local authority officers did not unanimously support the design. The Council's landscape architects and ecologists were helpful, but others wanted tarmac paths and significant lighting. The site is big and there were budgetary constraints, but our client listened carefully and was very supportive.

Design challenges included balancing the needs of wetland birds with service provision, such as overhead power lines. The removal of protective fencing by local vandals also made the job of separating protected species, such as water voles, great crested newts and badgers, from site works considerably more difficult than we anticipated.

We are delighted by how the reserve is developing – families and bird watchers love it, the lagoons are attracting estuarine birds and water voles have moved unaided into the reserve.



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